

September 2020: Mayor's Monthly Message

Just a friendly reminder that there is only 29 days to complete your census. The deadline to respond to the 2020 Census is Wednesday, September 30th. Your participation will help Florence secure valuable funding to support our fire and police departments, schools, hospitals, roads and more. Take the Census online now: my2020Census.gov

As a Town, we took a collaborative and transparent approach to ensuring that our local businesses, non-profits, and food banks would have additional funding to reimburse them for their contributions towards improving public health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I am appreciative of the feedback we have received, the process we have worked through, and thankful that we are able to make a positive impact. Here is a link to the application and information as well.

<https://www.florenceaz.gov/rsgrant/>

This year, Florence Councilman Bill Hawkins and I were recognized by the Arizona League of Cities and Towns for our years of service. Bill served on the council for 12 years and I have 8 years of service. Please take a moment to remember Bill for his dedication and commitment to our community. He was a compassionate, genuine, and kind man who built quality relationships, and always worked to move Florence forward.

Thank You to Planning and Zoning for the two public hearings regarding the General Plan Amendment. It passed unanimously. During the meeting, there was also an update provided regarding the search for an Economic Development Director. As well as building and development south of the Gila River. It is a great time to be in Florence! There is much opportunity for prosperity and growth that is upon us right now. From the newspaper today: "Grinder understands the planned sports complex is the anchor of the development, but recognizes the vast array of needs by the community and is committed to bring additional amenities to the project that the entire community can enjoy," the release said. "Restaurants, retail, and leisure activities are just some of the amenities being brought to the total scope of the development in response to many of the concerns that have been brought to light in many conversations with the town of Florence and Pinal County."

I want to take a moment to recognize our Community Services Department for all they do for our community. During this time, they have provided many creative opportunities to be actively involved, utilizing social distancing and/or virtual platforms. In reflecting back, I provided this information to Mark Cowling in January 2020. "Our Community Services Department, also known as Parks and Recreation has been quite busy with planning and facilitating the daily activities and events. They work hard at providing programs, services and access to facilities that enrich the quality of life for all residents. Some highlights include: implementation of the "Give-A-Lift" program, utilizing volunteer drivers to help elderly and disabled get to medical appointments; The adoption of the Active Transportation Plan; and The Arts and Culture Commission created a new mural in Historic Downtown Florence. We have also worked diligently in coordinating engaging activities for all to participate. While we just finished up our annual Jr. Parade Parade and Rodeo, Christmas on Main St, and our 1st Inaugural Jingle Bell Jog 5K, we

have many more events coming up. Some of our larger scale events are: Make a Difference Day in January; Memories on Main Car Classics and Customs Car and Bike Show; As well as our Historic Home Tour in February. Here's a fun fact: In 2019, the Historic Home Tour was recognized with the Outstanding Cultural Awareness Program Award by the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association. During the month of March, we'll have our first Florence Music Festival, hosted at Heritage Park. There will be camping, live music, family fun and more! This leads us into the month of April, where there is our annual Road to Country Thunder, which gets everyone excited for the Country Thunder Festival the following week. In an effort to communicate all of these events and more, they're posted on our town website. As well as residents receive a quarterly catalog detailing all of the activities and events available.

After much planning and coordination, this past Veteran's Day, we held a ribbon cutting ceremony to honor the completion and dedication of the Florence Veterans Memorial Plaza. Many organizations and people were involved in bringing this vision to reality. The memorial includes a bald eagle statue and poles flying the American, Arizona, and prisoners of war flags. As Vice Mayor John Anderson stated, "The eagle is a symbol of freedom, and so many of you have helped protect that freedom." A plaque behind the memorial recognizes major contributors to the project, but fundraising is still on going. Our goal is to have benches, and tables with umbrellas available for seating.

Other accomplishments we have made include: The Safe Routes to School Plans, Active Transportation Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and Regional Transportation Plan. In addition, the Downtown Redevelopment Plan was also a major undertaking that will prepare our downtown for preservation and revitalization. As well as other recognitions are as follows: #1 Best Suburb to Buy a House in Phoenix Area, Niche, #1 Best Places for Young Professionals in Pinal County, Niche, #1 Best Places to Retire in Arizona, HomeSnacks, #3 Best Place to Retire, AZBigMedia, #10 Best AZ Retirement Communities, Anthem at Merrill Ranch, GolfAt55.

Despite all of this work on plans, infrastructure, and revitalization, the Town's financial position is as strong as it has ever been. At the close of last fiscal year, the Town's governmental funds reported combined fund balances of \$42.3 million, which was an increase of \$4.3 million over the previous year. Our unassigned fund balance, which is available for spending at the Town's discretion, was \$10.2 million. This represents nearly 75% of our General Fund budget, and is a tremendous asset for the Town moving forward. Being fiscally strong makes the Town capable of meeting its obligations, both financially and socially."

Mark your calendars: The 1st Historic Florence Arts and Culture Festival will be happening soon! Historic Main Street will be lined with arts and craft vendors exhibiting their unique work for the weekend.

Sincerely,

Tara Walter
Mayor of Florence, AZ